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### **Local Student Experiences Marine Science Firsthand at Woods Hole Science Aquarium**

They came from diverse educational and family backgrounds and from states across the nation, but for Meghan-Elizabeth Foster of Milford, Mass., one of the 11 high school and college students who spent the summer at the Woods Hole Science Aquarium (WHSA) in Falmouth, Mass., it was a summer to remember.

Feeding fish, training harbor seals, cleaning tanks, leading shore-side collecting trips for the public, and helping children and adults learn about marine animals at the touch tanks were all part of her daily routine. The WHSA offers three summer programs for students who have completed grade 10 or higher. The programs are run by the WHSA staff, and are projects of NOAA's Northeast Fisheries Science Center and the neighboring private, nonprofit Marine Biological Laboratory.

As a summer high school volunteer last year and one of three paid college student interns this year at the Woods Hole Science Aquarium, she has led collecting trips to local beaches, taught young children about animals in the Aquarium's touch tanks, and became convinced informal education in marine biology is the career for her.

"I want to teach the public how to preserve our marine life," she said of her summer experiences. "I had hands-on experience working with animals at the Aquarium, especially the two harbor seals LuSeal and Bumper, and met many marine scientists. And I got to teach children and adults about the animals they see when they go to the beach. I know now that I want to pursue a career in informal ocean education."

Foster was one of three college students working at the Aquarium June 30 through August 20 through the Bradford E. Brown Student Internship program, named for a retired NOAA Fisheries scientist who was a leader in recruiting young people into fishery science.

The annual internships provide students with the opportunity to work with a professional staff caring for a collection of about 140 species of fish and invertebrates common to the continental shelf from Maine to North Carolina, two harbor seals, and sometimes sea turtles held for rehabilitation and eventual release. The interns learn about marine animal husbandry, aquarium operations, conservation, and public education. They

are also trained to serve as assistant naturalists on public collecting walks to local harbors and estuaries.

The college interns also participated in the two-week Careers in Marine Science Seminar July 21 to August 1, along with eight high school students from California, Massachusetts, New York and Utah. The seminar is designed to give students an idea of what people working in Woods Hole do and how different areas of science contribute to the larger effort to understand the marine world and to manage marine resources wisely.

A 2007 graduate of Milford High School, Foster is a sophomore at Roger Williams University pursuing a double major in marine biology and secondary education. She is a member of the college's marine science, outing and SCUBA clubs, Future Teachers of America, and plays intramural soccer. She also serves as a referee for the Hopedale soccer league and is active in Girl Scouts, earning the organization's highest honor, the Girl Scout Gold Award, in 2007.

Despite a demanding schedule, Foster spends as much time as she can on and around the ocean. While in high school she attended the Massachusetts Maritime Academy's Environmental Symposia to learn about careers in marine and environmental sciences from 2004 to 2006.

Foster has also sailed aboard the *Corwith Cramer*, studying oceanography and the intertidal zone of Appledore Island Marine Lab in the Gulf of Maine as a participant in a Sea Education Association high school program. And she visited Belize during a school vacation with a marine biology teacher and ten other students, studying both the rain forest and Mayan culture and the Central American nation's coral reefs.

Given her interest in both marine biology and education, Foster took early childhood education classes in high school, working with second graders in a local elementary school and writing and illustrating a children's book as part of psychology of early childhood courses. An independent study in the sciences enabled Foster to gain experience organizing specimens in the high school's science department and teach marine science classes about SCUBA and setting up and maintaining an aquarium.

Last summer, Foster applied to the Woods Hole Science Aquarium's Careers in Marine Science Program, a two-week volunteer program for students to learn about potential careers through seminars and lectures, lab tours and field trips. She also worked with the college interns and Aquarium staff to learn animal husbandry, basic duties of an aquarist, and how to collect specimens. One of her favorite duties was assisting with the rehabilitation of Cumin, a loggerhead sea turtle released back to the wild at the end of the summer.

This year as a paid college intern Foster helped mentor eight high school students and train the Aquarium's newest resident, a one-year old male harbor seal named Bumper who stranded on Long Island after a shark attack, which left him blind and unable to survive in the wild.

Foster and the other students were kept busy with Aquarium duties during the day, but enjoyed many activities together at night and on weekends, from playing soccer to seeing the latest Batman film at the local theater.

“I have had the opportunity to work with and learn from scientists and the other students, learn a lot about aquarium operations, and acquire new skills,” she said of this summer’s experience. “My ideal job would be to work at an aquarium and teach people how they can help save the environment and marine life.”

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